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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 001447

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [KPAO](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: POPULAR WEEKLY CLOSED BY UZBEK AUTHORITIES

Classified By: CDA Brad Hanson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) The Uzbek Agency for Press and Information closed the popular Uzbek Islam-oriented weekly Odamlar Orasida (Among the People) on July 30 for alleged violation of media laws. The Uzbek authorities, unsurprisingly, did not outline the specific breaches of the law.

12. (C) Launched in February 2007 with a circulation of only 2,000 copies, Odamlar Orasida enjoyed quick and significant expansion of readership, publishing 11,000 copies at the time of its closure only five months after commencing its work. Commentators opined in web-based news reports that these statistics alone could have led to the paper's demise. They noted that the Uzbek authorities looked poorly upon papers which reached more people than government publications. The newspaper's editor-in-chief and former Edward R. Murrow Grantee, Khairulla Khamidov, shared with Embassy staff on August 2 that he believes President Karimov's daughter, who owns a number of media outlets, may have personally called for the paper's closure, fearing its popularity.

13. (U) Khamidov developed a reputation of publishing eye-opening, intellectual articles on a broad range of topics not typically covered in Uzbek newspapers. While avoiding political news directly, the paper raised sensitive subjects such as the problem of corruption and bribes in Uzbek society, the possible harm of vaccinations to children, and the establishment of prostitution rings in the capital, despite their illegality. The issues outlined in the newspaper became the focus of discussions throughout the city. Adept at combining secular with religious topics, Khamidov continues to lead a weekly religious radio program.

14. (C) Comment: While the Uzbek Constitution guarantees freedom of speech, the silencing of this popular weekly underscores yet again the Uzbek government's determination to snuff out independent voices in Uzbekistan. Khamidov speculated that these hard-line tactics may increase in the lead up to the Presidential elections in December 2007. This was not the first time Khamidov ran into difficulties with the Uzbek authorities. He was fired from State Radio when he returned from his International Visitor Program.

HANSON